

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY PARIS

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INFO AMEMBASSY ANKARA

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AMCONSUL STRASBOURG

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 PARIS 04793

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, FR, PGOV

SU3JECT: FRENCH COMMUNIST PARTY CONGRESS, FEBRUARY 4-7

SUMMARY. THE 22ND PCF CONGRESS WAS AN OPERATION DESIGN-
ED TO CONVINCE THE FRENCH VOTER THAT THE COMMUNIST PARTY
IS AN ACCEPTABLE PARTICIPANT IN THE FRENCH DEMOCRATIC
TRADITION. THERE WERE NO SUBSTANTIVE SURPRISES: AS
EXPECTED, THE CONGRESS

- SLIGHTLY EXPANDED THE PCF'S CRITIQUE OF
REPRESSIVE PRACTICES IN THE SOVIET UNION;
- ENDORSED DROPPING THE DOCTRINE OF THE "DICTA-
TORSHIP OF THE PROLETARIAT" FROM THE PARTY'S
POSITION STATEMENTS;
- CALLED FOR A "UNION OF THE PEOPLE OF FRANCE";
- OPENED THE PARTY'S PREPARATIONS FOR THE 1977
MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS BY CALLING FOR IMMEDIATE
SOCIALIST AGREEMENT TO JOINT LISTS OF CANDI-
DATES IN CITIES OVER 30,000 POPULATION.

THE CONGRESS' DECISIONS WERE MADE IN A MONOLITHIC STYLE,
WHICH SURPRISED SOME OBSERVERS WHO HAD ANTICIPATED THAT
THE PARTY'S ATTEMPT TO SELL ITS NEW LOOK WOULD EXTEND TO
MANIFESTATIONS OF MORE DEMOCRATIC PRACTICE. GEORGES
MARCHAIS, THE PCF'S SECRETARY-GENERAL, WAS THE SUPERSTAR
OF THE CONGRESS. APPARENTLY FULLY RECOVERED FROM HIS
CORONARY A YEAR AGO, MARCHAIS SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN NOTABLY
SUCCESSFUL IN ESTABLISHING AND MAINTAINING TIGHT CONTROL
OVER THE PROCEEDINGS -- THE OTHER WINGS OF THE PARTY
SHOWED NO SIGN OF EXISTENCE AT THE CONGRESS. END SUMMARY.

THE CONGRESS

1. CRITICIZING THE SOVIETS...: MARCHAIS' OPENING-DAY
SPEECH, SENSATIONALLY REPORTED AS HAVING "SEVERELY CRITI-
CIZED" THE SOVIET UNION, IN FACT WENT ONLY A HESITANT
STEP BEYOND THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE'S PREVIOUS STATEMENTS
(SEE PARIS 33575, DEC 23, 1975. THE TONE OF MAR-
CHAIS' REMARKS WAS SORROWFUL RATHER THAN ANGRY, WITH
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THE SECRETARY-GENERAL CAREFUL TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE SOVIET
UNION'S ROLE IN "THE STRUGGLE AGAINST THE EXPLOITATION
OF MAN." HIS MOST-APPLAUDED STATEMENT SAID "WE CANNOT
ALLOW THE COMMUNIST IDEAL, WHOSE OBJECTIVE IS THE HAPPI-
NESS OF MAN... TO BE STAINED BY UNJUSTIFIED AND UNJUST
ACTS." MARCHAIS ALSO REPEATED THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE'S
EARLIER WARNING THAT IT WOULD NOT TOLERATE "THE TEMPTA-
TION TO SUBSTITUTE AUTHORITARIANISM AND REPRESSION FOR
THE DEMOCRATIC EFFORTS OF CONVICTION, CONFRONTATION AND
THE STRUGGLE OF IDEALS." HE WENT ON TO NOTE THAT THE

PCF COULD EVEN LESS COUNTENANCE REPRESSION IN THE NAME OF DEFENDING SOCIALISM (PRESUMABLY AGAINST COUNTER-REVOLUTIONARY ATTACKS) "WHEN IT IS A MATTER OF A COUNTRY WHOSE PEOPLE IS SOLIDLY AND DEFINITELY UNITED AROUND THE SOCIALIST EFFORT WHICH HAS LASTED FOR SEVERAL DECADES." TAKEN AS A WHOLE, MARCHAIS' REFLECTIONS ON THE SOVIET UNION DID NOT GO VERY FAR. LARGELY A COMPENDIUM OF CENTRAL COMMITTEE AND FRANCE NOUVELLE (THE PARTY'S INTELLECTUAL WEEKLY) STATEMENTS SINCE THE BEGINNING OF PREPARATIONS FOR THE EUROPEAN CONFERENCE OF COMMUNIST PARTIES (ECCP), MARCHAIS' COMMENTS ADDED ONLY ONE REALLY NEW ELEMENT: HE DIRECTLY WARNED THE SOVIETS THAT "REVOLUTIONARY JUSTICE" (READ REPRESSION) IS NOT ADMISSIBLE WHERE SOCIALISM IS DEFINITELY INSTALLED. IN SHORT, MARCHAIS' "ANTI-SOVIETISM" IS MORE NOTABLE FOR THE FACT THAT HE CHOSE A CONGRESS -- WITH CPSU OBSERVER KIRILENKO IN ATTENDANCE -- TO SAY IT THAN FOR ITS VIGOR.

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2....WHILE LOOKING AT THE FRENCH: MOST PRESS OBSERVERS, COMMENTING ON THE CRITICISM OF THE SOVIETS, READ THE MARCHAIS SPEECH AS AN ATTEMPT TO CONVINCE THE FRENCH THAT THE PCF IS NOW MORE INDEPENDENT OF THE SOVIET UNION. NEVER FAR FROM MOST OBSERVERS' ANALYSES WAS THE EXAMPLE OF THE ITALIAN COMMUNISTS, WHO HAVE SOUGHT RESPECTABILITY BY TAKING THEIR DISTANCE FROM THE SOVIETS. EQUALLY PRESENT IN THE PRESS WAS THE THOUGHT THAT MARCHAIS IS ONLY MAKING A SMALL BEGINNING AT CONVINCING THE FRENCH THAT THE PCF'S DOCTRINE IS NOT UNDULY INFLUENCED BY MOSCOW'S DESIRES. THE PCF IS TREADING ON DANGEROUS GROUND FOR, ON THE ONE HAND, IT MUST CONVINCE MODERATE FRENCH VOTERS THAT THE COMMUNISTS WILL NOT SACRIFICE FRENCH NATIONAL INTERESTS IN THE NAME OF WORKING-CLASS INTERNATIONALISM, WHILE SIMULTANEOUSLY IT MUST AVOID OVER-CRITICISM OF THE SOVIETS (WHICH WOULD DISORIENT ITS OWN RANK-AND-FILE). MARCHAIS' EFFORTS TO LOOK AS RESPECTABLE AS THE ITALIAN COMMUNISTS AND HIS JOINT DECLARATION WITH THE PCI (SEE PARIS 30521, NOVEMBER 21, 1975) PRESENT THE OPENING SHOTS IN A LONG CAMPAIGN. ONE HARDLINING DELEGATE SOUNDED A RARE FACTIONAL NOTE WHEN HE CALLED MARCHAIS' SPEECH "A CHILD'S SONG, SUNG IN ITALIAN, WHICH SEEKS TO BECOME AN OPERA."

3. PROLETARIAN DICTATORSHIP -- AN ALBATROSS NOW CAST AWAY: FOR YEARS, FRENCH ANTI-COMMUNIST RHETORIC HAS FOCUSED ON THE PCF'S TIES WITH MOSCOW, THE PARTY'S PUBLIC DEVOTION TO THE LENINIST PRINCIPLE THAT POWER COULD ONLY COME TO THE COMMUNISTS BY REVOLUTION AND THE MARXIST CREDO THAT, ONCE IN POWER, ONLY A DICTATORSHIP OF THE PROLETARIAT COULD KEEP THE FORCES OF REACTION FROM WIPING OUT THE RESULTS OF THE REVOLUTION. THE PARTY'S 1968 CHAMPIGNY MANIFESTO (WHICH MADE POSSIBLE TODAY'S UNITED LEFT) ADMITTED THAT POWER IN FRANCE
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COULD NOT BE TAKEN BY A REVOLUTION; SINCE THEN THE PARTY HAS WORKED HARD WITHOUT NOTABLE SUCCESS TO ASSURE FRENCH VOTERS OF ITS COMMITMENT TO ARRIVING IN POWER VIA THE BALLOT BOX. BUT THE PHRASE "DICTATORSHIP OF THE PROLETARIAT" REMAINED AS AN ALBATROSS DRAPED AROUND THE PARTY'S BACK. OVER A MONTH AGO, MARCHAIS PROPOSED THAT THE PARTY DROP THE PHRASE AS NO LONGER APPLICABLE TO "CURRENT FRENCH REALITIES."

4. GETTING RID OF THE ALBATROSS -- A MEASURE OF MARCHAIS' CONTROL: ONE OF THE MORE ILLUMINATING SPECTACLES OF THE CONGRESS WAS THE PARADE OF "VETERANS" (THOSE WHO JOINED THE PARTY IN THE 1920'S AND WHO HAVE BEEN THE STALWARTS OF STALINISM IN RECENT YEARS) WHOSE VOICES WERE HEARD AT THE PODIUM, EXPRESSING WILLINGNESS TO ABANDON THE DOCTRINE. EVEN THOUGH SOME OF THESE VETERANS HAD BEEN IN THE PUBLIC FOREFRONT OF BATTLES WITHIN THE FEDERATIONS IN DEFENSE OF THE DOCTRINE, BY THE TIME THE CONGRESS WAS OVER, IT WAS EVIDENT THAT THEY TOO HAD BENT TO MARCHAIS' ANALYSIS. THEY MAY NOT HAVE LIKED IT. THEY MAY NOT HAVE BEEN CONVINCED. BUT THERE WAS NO PUBLIC OPPOSITION AT THIS CONGRESS AS THERE HAD BEEN AT THE LAST NATIONAL CONGRESS (VITRY; 1974).

5. THE UNION OF THE PEOPLE OF FRANCE: THE PCF ALSO ADOPTED THE IDEA OF A UNION WHICH GOES FAR BEYOND THE PRESENT UNITED LEFT. AS IT IS CURRENTLY CONCEIVED, THE UNION OF THE PEOPLE OF FRANCE (UPF) IS A CALL TO DISSIDENT ELEMENTS IN THE UDR, LEFT CHRISTIANS AND NATIONALISTS TO JOIN WITH THE COMMUNISTS IN A LOOSELY-DEFINED, ISSUE-ORIENTED ALLIANCE. THE PCF BELIEVES THAT THE TIME IS RIPE FOR A WIDER MOVEMENT IN OPPOSITION TO "ATLANTICISM" AND POPULAR ELECTIONS TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT. THE UPF WOULD THUS BECOME A WIDELY-BASED COALITION IN WHICH THE COMMUNISTS, NATURALLY ENOUGH, BELIEVE THEY WOULD BE THE PRIME MOTIVE FORCE. POTENTIALLY THREATENED BY THE UPF ARE THE SOCIALISTS, WHO VIEW THEMSELVES AS BEING END-RUN BY A PCF APPEAL TO FRENCHMEN WHO WOULD

NOT RESPECT THE "DISCIPLINE OF THE COMMON PROGRAM", AND
WHO COULD GIVE THE PCF A KIND OF EXTRA-GOVERNMENTAL POWER
SHOULD THE UNITED LEFT COME TO POWER. AND, TO THE SOCIA-
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LISTS, THAT SPELLS NOVEMBER IN LISBON.

6. GEORGES MARCHAIS SUPERSTAR: OVER THE PAST YEAR
RUMORS CONCERNING THE DEGREE OF MARCHAIS' CONTROL OVER HIS
PARTY HAVE CIRCULATED IN PARIS' POLITICAL CIRCLES. MAR-
CHAIS WAS SAID TO BE HAVING TROUBLES WITH THE PARTY'S
LEFT AND ITS INTELLECTUALS; HE WAS SAID TO BE IN TROUBLE
WITH THE PARTY'S STALINISTS OVER HIS ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE

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INFO AMEMBASSY ANKARA
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EUROPEAN CONFERENCE OF COMMUNIST PARTIES. BUT AT THE CONGRESS MARCHAIS PROVED THAT HE IS CAPABLE OF RUNNING A TIGHT SHIP. HIS CONTROL OVER THE PARTY MAY HAVE BEEN BOUGHT AT A HIGHER PRICE THAN WAS IMMEDIATELY APPARENT. THE FACT THAT THE PARTY'S POLICY ON THE ECCP DID NOT RECEIVE EXTENSIVE DISCUSSION MAY HAVE BEEN THE QUID MARCHAIS HAD TO PAY FOR ENDORSEMENT OF PARTY STATEMENTS ON PORNOGRAPHY (A FUNCTION OF BOURGEOIS SOCIETY) AND SUPPORT OVER THE DICTATORSHIP OF THE PROLETARIAT ISSUE. BUT WHATEVER THE PRICE MARCHAIS OBVIOUSLY DID NOT FIND IT ONEROUS. HIS IMAGE AS THE SMILING, AFFABLE LEADER OF A YOUNG AND DYNAMIC PARTY, AN IMAGE WHICH HE HAS WORKED HARD TO PROJECT SINCE THE END OF AUGUST, SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN REINFORCED BY PRESS COVERAGE OF THE CONGRESS.

REACTIONS

7. THE SOCIALISTS: THE PCF'S ALLIES IN THE UNION OF THE LEFT HAVE FOUND IT USEFUL TO TAKE TWO SEPARATE LINES OF REACTION. THE FIRST, ENUNCIATED PRIOR TO AND DURING THE CONGRESS IN THE PS WEEKLY L'UNITE BY PS NATIONAL SECRETARY CLAUDE ESTIER, STRESSED THE "NATURAL INTERNAL EVOLUTIONS" OF THE PCF WHICH LED TO THE CONGRESS' RELATIVE MODERATION (AFTER THE CONGRESS, ESTIER HARSHLY CRITICIZED THE PCF FOR ITS REFUSAL OF POLYCENTRICITY).

A MORE CAUTIOUS LOOK AT THE PCF EMERGES FROM THE SO-CALLED JOSPIN REPORT, ADOPTED BY THE PS ON JANUARY 21 AND PUBLISHED TEN DAYS PRIOR TO THE OPENING OF THE CONGRESS. LIONEL JOSPIN, THE PS' SECRETARY FOR THIRD WORLD AFFAIRS AND, AFTER MITTERRAND, THE PARTY'S TOP COMMUNIST-WATCHER, ARGUES THAT

- THE PCF IS ONLY CHANGING (TO THE EXTENT THAT IT IS CHANGING) AS A RESULT OF NEEDS TO EMULATE THE ELECTORALLY MORE SUCCESSFUL PS;
- WHILE THE PCF MAY BE SHOWING SIGNS OF A CERTAIN SOFTENING IN ITS RELATIONS WITH THE OTHER

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EUROPEAN PARTIES (JOINT DECLARATIONS WITH THE ITALIANS; OPPOSITION TO THE SOVIET PARTY OVER BERLIN AND REPRESSION IN THE SOVIET UNION), THAT ATTITUDE HAS NOT CARRIED OVER TO THE INTERNAL SCENE, WHERE THE PCF HAS CONTINUED TO ASSERT ITS CLAIM TO BE THE UNIQUE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE WORKING CLASS;

- IT IS FAR TOO EARLY TO TELL WHAT EFFECT THE PCF'S CHANGE IN IMAGE WILL HAVE ON THE UNITED LEFT.

8. THE PRESS: THE PARTY'S IMAGE DURING THIS EXERCISE RECEIVED BOTH PRAISE AND BRICKBATS FROM THE FRENCH PRESS. A WIDESPREAD MEDIA CONSENSUS SEEMED TO BELIEVE THAT THE CONGRESS WAS A DANCE OF SEDUCTION AIMED AT FRENCH VOTERS. MANY FOUND THE PARTY'S EFFORTS TO PROJECT AN IMAGE OF YOUTH AND DYNAMISM RELATIVELY CONVINCING. CONSERVATIVE NEWSPAPERS FOUND MORE HESITANCY AMONG PARTY RANK-AND-FILERS OVER THE CONGRESS' NEW DIRECTIONS THAN DID SOCIALIST (AND SOME NON-US DIPLOMATIC) OBSERVERS. ONE IMPRESSION SEEMS COMMON TO THE ENTIRE SPECTRUM OF THE NON-PCF PRESS: THE PCF HAS MOVED INTO ITS NEW POSITIONS WITH A DISPLAY OF OLD-FASHIONED MONOLITHISM. THE LACK OF DISSENT FROM MARCHAIS' NEWLY-ANNOUNCED LINES, THE COMPLETE ABSENCE OF ANY EVIDENCE OF FACTIONALISM IN THE PARTY, THE APPARENT MUZZLING OF L'HUMANITE DIRECTOR ROLAND LEROY'S PRO-SOVIET TROOPS AND THE FACT THAT THE NEW PROPOSITIONS WERE IN A LARGE MEASURE HANDED DOWN FROM ON HIGH, ALL COMBINED TO GIVE THE PRESS AN OPPORTUNITY TO SEVERELY CRITICIZE ONCE MORE THE IDEA OF DEMOCRATIC CENTRALISM WHICH IS THE THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING OF THE PCF'S FUNCTIONING.

9. THE ISSUE OF LIBERTIES: THE PCF SPENT THE SUMMER OF 1975 TRYING TO CONVINCE THE FRENCH THAT IT HAD A CONCERN FOR PUBLIC LIBERTIES EQUAL TO THAT OF THE PS. THAT CAMPAIGN CAME APART UNDER SAVAGE CRITICISM OF THE PCF'S

BLIND SUPPORT FOR THE PORTUGUESE COMMUNISTS. BUT THE
FRENCH PRESS, WHILE NOT TAKING THE CONGRESS' SELF-CONGRA-
TULATORY STATEMENTS AT THEIR FACE VALUE, APPEARS TO BE
LESS INTERESTED IN HUNTING FOR CHINKS IN THAT PARTICULAR
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ARMOR, AND THIS MAY BE A RESULT OF THE BELIEF THAT THE
PCF'S ROLE IN SECURING LEONID PLYUSHCH'S RELEASE GRANTS
THE PARTY A CERTAIN RESPITE. ONE SOCIALIST DEPUTY SUG-
GESTED THAT "THERE'S ALMOST A CONSCIOUS PRESS EFFORT
NOT TO DISCOURAGE THE PCF FROM PURSUING ITS LINE."

10. A CHANGING PARTY: THIS WAS THE YOUNGEST PCF CON-
GRESS IN YEARS (SOME 60 PERCENT OF THE PARTY IS UNDER

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40; ABOUT HALF THE CURRENT MEMBERSHIP HAS JOINED SINCE 1968). BY COMPARISON TO THE HOARY VETERANS WHO USED TO DOMINATE THE PARTY'S CONGRESSES, THE DELEGATES WERE MORE SOPHISTICATED IN THEIR ANALYSES, LESS DOCTRINAIRE AND SEEMINGLY BETTER EDUCATED. THEY WERE ALSO BETTER DRESSED AND THE CARS IN THE DELEGATES' PARKING LOT INDICATE THAT THE PCF IS A LONG WAY FROM ITS GRIM WORKING-CLASS ORIGINS. WOMEN FORMED A HIGHLY VISIBLE PRESENCE WITH NINE WOMEN BEING ELECTED TO CANDIDATE MEMBERSHIP ON THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE (OUT OF 24 NEW CANDIDATE MEMBERS) AND SEVEN (OF 27) WOMEN BEING PROMOTED FROM CANDIDATE MEMBER TO FULL MEMBER OF THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE. ONE WOMAN WAS SHIFTED FROM CANDIDATE MEMBERSHIP TO FULL MEMBERSHIP IN THE POLITBURO. THE AVERAGE AGE OF NEW CANDIDATE MEMBERS OF THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE WAS 36.

THE EFFECTS OF THE CONGRESS

11. ON THE SOCIALISTS: ESTIER'S PRE-CONGRESS OPTIMISM (SEE ABOVE) NOW APPEARS PREMATURE. THE PS, LIKE FRONT-RUNNERS EVERYWHERE, IS STILL THE MAJOR TARGET OF THE PCF'S DOMESTIC MOVES. THE UPF COULD POTENTIALLY BE A MAJOR THREAT TO THE PS' CONTINUED PROSPECTING AMONG DISSIDENT GAULLISTS AND OTHER ELEMENTS OF THE MAJORITY.

BUT THE REAL PROBLEM IS ONE OF IMAGE: BOTH PCF AND PS ARE WILLING TO CONTINUE THE UNION OF THE LEFT AS LONG AS EACH BELIEVES IT CAN OUT-MUSCLE THE OTHER. FOR THE PS, INCREASINGLY CONFIDENT THAT THE UNITED LEFT CAN WIN AN ABSOLUTE MAJORITY IN THE NEXT LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS, THE COMING JOB IS TO MAINTAIN THE LEAD WHICH PRE-CONGRESS POLLS GAVE IT (ABOUT 33 PERCENT IN COMPARISON TO THE PCF'S 19 PERCENT OF VOTER INTENTIONS). FOR THE PCF, THE TASK IS MORE SUBTLE: WHILE SEEKING TO IMPROVE ITS POSITION WITH RESPECT TO THE PS, IT MUST BE CAREFUL TO AVOID THE APPEARANCE OF DOMINATING THE UNITED LEFT FOR FEAR OF PROVOKING A CONSERVATIVE REACTION WITHIN THE ELECTORATE.

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12. ON THE MAJORITY: MANY CONSERVATIVE OBSERVERS ARE ATTACHING GREAT SIGNIFICANCE TO THE RELATIVE ABSENCE OF DEBATE ON THE ECCP. JEAN KANAPA, THE PCF'S "FOREIGN MINISTER" AND THE PCF'S PRINCIPAL SPOKESMAN ON ECCP MATTERS, WAS CERTAINLY IN EVIDENCE AT THE CONGRESS, BUT HIS INTERVENTIONS WERE LIMITED TO BANALITIES AND NO REAL HINT OF THE HARD INTER-PARTY BRAWLING AT BERLIN CAME THROUGH IN HIS SPEECHES. TO THE GOVERNMENT MAJORITY THIS IS A SIGN THAT THE PCF HAS NOT, IN FACT, DECIDED TO PURSUE AN INDEPENDENT POLICY FROM THE EASTERN EUROPEAN PARTIES. FOR THE REST, CONSERVATIVE REACTION HAS REMAINED CLASSIC: CRITICISM OF THE PARTY'S STAND ON LIBERTIES, ACCUSATIONS OF HYPOCRISY' SUSPICION OF THE PCF'S CRITIQUES OF MOSCOW.

13. ON THE PCF: MANY COMMUNISTS, BOTH DELEGATES AND NON-DELEGATES, ARE BUOYED UP BY THE CONGRESS. THE MOOD IS A SHARP CONTRAST TO "PCF PUBLIC OPINION." FOLLOWING THE 1974 VITRY CONGRESS. THEN MOST OBSERVERS WERE TALKING ABOUT AN ATMOSPHERE OF GROUSING; NOW THE REACTIONS OF PARTY RANK-AND-FILEERS APPEAR TO BE POSITIVE. THE PARTY FAITHFUL APPEAR TO BELIEVE THAT A REVITALIZED PCF, FREE OF THE OLD SHIBBOLETHS, IS NOW GOING TO BE ABLE TO PURSUE VOTERS WHEREVER THEY CAN BE FOUND ACROSS THE ENTIRE POLITICAL SPECTRUM. MORE IMPORTANT, MANY DELEGATES APPEARED GENUINELY PLEASED AT THE PROSPECT OF SOME FORM OF LOCAL DIALOGUE WITH THE PS. WHATEVER THE REALITY, THE PCF'S MOOD A FEW DAYS AFTER THE END OF THE CONGRESS IS UP.

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Message Attributes

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Document Number: 1976PARIS04793
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Enclosure: n/a
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From: PARIS
Handling Restrictions: n/a
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